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WORLD | ASIA

## Lawmaker Blocks Deal to Sell F-16s to Pakistan

Republican senator is blocking sale because of Islamabad's relationship with a militant group known for targeting U.S.-trained security forces in Afghanistan

By **GORDON LUBOLD**

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WASHINGTON—A senior Republican senator is blocking the Obama administration's subsidized sale of as many as eight new F-16 jet fighters to Pakistan because of Islamabad's relationship with a militant group known for targeting U.S.-trained security forces in neighboring Afghanistan.

Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told Secretary of State John Kerry in a letter that he couldn't allow the Obama administration to use taxpayer funds to support the sale of the jets.

He cited attacks by the group known as the Haqqani network, saying the government in Islamabad continues to provide haven to its leaders. Pakistani officials weren't able to respond immediately for comment.

Mr. Corker, who recently returned from his fifth trip to Afghanistan, said the Pakistani government should be welcome to purchase the F-16s with its own money. The planned sale through the State Department's foreign military sales program, announced last year, aims to reward Pakistan for its efforts against militants.

"I do not want U.S. taxpayer dollars going to support these acquisitions," Mr. Corker said in an interview. "While we're spending tremendous amounts of U.S. dollars and certainly tremendous sacrifice in our men and women in uniform and by other agencies, they are working simultaneously to destabilize Afghanistan."

Mr. Corker said he was using his authority as a committee chairman to object single-handedly to the proposed sale.

“I fully understand that our relationship with Pakistan is both complicated and imperfect,” Mr. Corker wrote in the Feb. 9 letter to Mr. Kerry obtained by The Wall Street Journal. “Cooperation with Pakistan is important and has achieved some of our interests.”

But, he said, Pakistan’s activities are “immensely problematic” and contribute to the notion that Pakistan is a “duplicitous partner, moving sideways rather than forward in resolving regional challenges.”

Obama administration officials said the U.S. has provided equipment and technology to the Pakistanis “to significant effect” in Pakistan’s counterterrorism efforts and has helped the Pakistan military to be more effective against militants in the tribal regions but while minimizing “collateral damage.”

“Our relationship with Pakistan is not about any one system, nor any one capability,” said David McKeeby, of the State Department’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, which oversees foreign military sales. “We go deeper than that.”

A Pentagon spokesman said he couldn’t discuss foreign military sales until Congress is formally notified.

”Our bilateral defense relationship with Pakistan is focused on enhancing counterterrorism capabilities and improving the military’s ability to deny ungoverned spaces to terrorists that undermine stability in the region,” said Christopher Sherwood, a Pentagon spokesman.

**Write to Gordon Lubold at [Gordon.Lubold@wsj.com](mailto:Gordon.Lubold@wsj.com)**

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